SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE HEARINGS - KENNAN

Statement on "The Communist World in 1967"
by the Honorable George Kennan
for the Senate Foreign Relations Committee
30 January 1967

Mr. Chairman:
Distinguished Members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee:

The subject on which you would like me to testify today is, as I understand it, "The Communist World in 1967." In reflecting on what I might usefully say in the way of initial remarks on this vast subject, it occurred to me that the present state of the Communist world cannot be understood except in its historical context. So I am going to ask for your patience in letting me turn back very briefly to the past and review once more the main events out of which this present situation has been formed.

As we all know, there grew up around the turn of the last century in a number of European countries, but particularly in Germany, a strong social-democratic political movement based on the writings and teachings of Karl Marx. In Western Europe this was, for the most part, a moderate and humane movement. It was revolutionary in its objectives, but moderate and democratic, for the most part, in its methods.

In Russia things took a somewhat different course. Here the Social-Democratic Party, coming late to the political scene, was affected by the violent and extreme tendencies that had already come to prevail in much of the older Russian revolutionary movement, with the result that the Party split from the start into two wings: one relatively moderate one, committed to the belief that the Party should observe democratic procedures in its own internal administration and should compete for mass political support; the other basing itself on the concept of the Party as a small conspiratorial core of highly trained and disciplined professional revolutionaries, and committed to the belief that desirable changes not only in Russian life but in the lives of all the advanced Western peoples could come only by violent revolution -- not by the operation of the normal democratic and parliamentary process. And it was this second and violent wing of the Russian Social-Democratic Party which, under the brilliant and uncompromising leadership of Lenin, triumphed in the

Russian Revolution fifty years ago this year, and established throughout Russia a dictatorial power which it has retained to the present day.

Now this triumph of the Bolsheviki, or the Communists as they now came to be called, in the Russian Revolution was one of the great determining events of this century, and one that endangered in the most serious way the interests of Western peoples. With this event the human and material resources of one of the world's great countries -- a country with tremendous economic and military as well as cultural potential -- came under the control of a group of fanatics deeply prejudiced against the traditional institutions of the Western countries and determined to do what they could to bring about the overthrow of the governments and social systems of those countries. They did not hesitate to undertake vigorous efforts in this direction; and in the conditions of instability and economic distress that followed the First World War they found many people in the West willing to accept their lead and to join them in these efforts. This was of course a dangerous situation. Its dangers were moderated at that time by the fact that Russia, weakened by the ravages of war and revolution, was not a strong military power for offensive purposes, and by the fact that the traditional institutions of Western countries proved much more resistant than had the institutions of Tsarist Russia to the revolutionary pressures which these people engendered. Nevertheless, the Soviet regime of Lenin's day, inspired by an intense world-revolutionary enthusiasm, presented a serious danger to the stability of the Western community of nations and an unprecedented problem for Western policymakers.

In the mid-nineteen twenties, Lenin's leadership was replaced by that of Stalin. This was a significant change. Stalin was a less fanatical, more cautious man, skeptical of the possibilities of achieving world revolution, anxious to retain his own personal ascendancy in the world communist movement, but interested more immediately in building up Russia's industrial and military establishment than in encouraging other Communist Parties to seize power. He was a crafty, cynical politician, a man of great and dangerous tactical ability in political action and no friend of the West. The reign of terror that he instituted in Russia in the nineteen-thirties and continued in some degree down to the day of his death was so extreme that it complicated in

many ways the maintenance of anything resembling normal relations between Russia and the Western countries. His behavior toward the West in the common confrontation with Hitler's Germany was devoid of both good will and good faith. Throughout his lifetime, too, Russia remained, although for reasons somewhat different than in Lenin's time, a dangerous adversary of the United States and other Western powers in world affairs.

Down to the Second World War Stalin kept the world communist movement under his own jealous and unrelenting personal control. There was, however, no major expansion of the geographic area to which Communist power extended until the final phases of the war against Hitler carried the Soviet armed forces into the heart of Europe. Stalin was quick to take advantage of this development as a means of extending the borders of the Soviet Union in the West and of installing or assisting the installation of Communist regimes in all of Eastern and part of Central Europe, including the Soviet zone of Germany. Slow to realize the dangers of this development, we had little choice but to accept it once it had occurred. The alternative was only to add another great war to the one we had just finished. The Sovietization of Eastern and Central Europe was part of the price we paid for the defeat of Hitler.

This success of Stalin's wartime statesmanship appeared to be supplemented in the immediate postwar period by the triumph of the Communists in China. This event was of course a great boon to the prestige of Communists everywhere. But it did not constitute quite the extension of Stalin's power that many people then thought it did. Differences between the two parties -- the Russian and the Chinese -- were of long standing. Once in control of China's resources, independent therefore of Russian support, and having their own national pride, the Chinese Communists saw no reason to take orders from Moscow or to respect Moscow's authority in the world communist movement. The Chinese Revolution did indeed mean the creation of another great Communist power, no less violently prejudiced against the West, no less hostile to Western interests and institutions, than Lenin's or Stalin's Russia. The differences between this power and the Soviet Union did not become openly apparent for several years to come; but in actuality Communist China represented for the Soviet Union from the start in some respects an ally, in other respects a rival, never a satellite.

The triumph of the Communists in China coincided in time with the decision of the Communist leaders of Yugoslavia, which had initially been included in the postwar Soviet bloc, to defy Moscow's authority and to strike out on an independent path. They were successful in doing this, and have maintained their independence ever since.

It will be observed, therefore, that while the events of the final phases of World War II and the immediate postwar period did indeed bring about significant increases in the territory ruled by Communist regimes, they also had the effect of destroying the monolithic character of Moscow's control of the world communist movement. Moscow did retain control over most of the territory -- not all -- that Russian troops had overrun in Eastern and Central Europe. Moscow further retained, for the time being, its dominant influence among the various Communist Parties in the countries where communism had not triumphed. But it had to accommodate itself to the existence of two Communist states -- China and Yugoslavia -- whose policies and behavior it could not control.

This was the situation that existed from 1948 down to Stalin's death five years later. After his death this situation underwent a fundamental alteration. The disorders in Eastern Germany in 1953 and the troubles in Hungary and Poland in 1956 shook Moscow's moral authority throughout the world communist movement. Khrushchev's effort, then, to improve relations with Yugoslavia -- an effort to which he felt himself driven precisely by the growing tension between Russia and China -- contributed further to the weakening of Moscow's authority among the Communists of the world because it appeared to give Russian sanction to Tito's independent course. It caused other Communist leaders to ask themselves: "Well, if Tito can follow an independent line and be respected and rewarded for it by Moscow, why can't we?" But most important of all was the emergence to the surface, beginning in 1957, of serious differences between the Soviet and Chinese Communist Parties and the development of these differences into a full-fledged open political conflict between two powers.

What earlier events had left undone in the way of destruction of the unity of the Communist bloc the Chinese-Soviet conflict now completed. In the light of this conflict, the other Communist Parties and regimes were not only placed in

a position where they could make independent choices and decisions; they were virtually forced to do so. A bewildering variety of options was now open to them. They could hold to Moscow. They could hold to Peking. They could take the Yugoslav course and follow neither of the great powers. They could follow the lead of one of the two great powers in their external relations, but follow their own needs and preferences in domestic policy. Or they could do just the opposite: They could follow Moscow's example, or Peking's example, in domestic policy, but strike out on their own in the field of foreign policy. The very inability to avoid a choice among these various alternatives forced the foreign Communists, right then and there, to a complete independence of decision. And this was an independence of which they could no longer really be deprived; for even if their decision ran to the respecting of the authority of one or the other of the great Communist powers, they would be doing this now of their own free choice, and they could withdraw their allegiance as easily and independently as they had given it.

The result was, of course, that decisions went in a variety of different ways. Bulgaria, for example, held in all respects to Moscow, Albania, to Peking. Rumania continued to adhere generally to the Russian example in its domestic practices but largely emancipated itself from Russian influence in its foreign policies. Poland did just the opposite.

The same dissimilarities soon became apparent in the reactions of the various Communist Parties not in power. They, too, were forced to make choices. Some adhered to Peking, some to Moscow. Some went one way at one time, another way at another. Some split up entirely into mutually antagonistic pro-Moscow or pro-Peking factions. Some, disgusted with the whole business and unable to get anything in the nature of effective guidance from either of the two great Communist capitals, simply decided to begin to disregard both of them and to go their own way.

This is the sort of Communist world we have before us today. The existence of this situation is a matter of easily ascertainable fact, not of speculation. This being the case, to attribute today to the various parties, regimes and factions that make up the world communist movement any sort of a unified political personality -- to speak of them as

though they represented a single disciplined force, operating under the conspiratorial control of a single political will, as I sometimes still hear people speak of them in this country, and occasionally even within the halls of this august legislative body -- is to fly in the face of an overwhelming body of evidence, to move intellectually in the realm of patent absurdity, to deny by implication the relevance of external evidence to the considerations and decisions of foreign affairs. The unity of the Communist bloc is a matter of the past; and it will not be restored. This Humpty Dumpty will not and cannot be reassembled.

Now this, of course, does not mean that there is no problem. These regimes and parties and factions remain Communist, or nominally Communist, even if they are not united; and as such they continue to reflect in varying degrees elements of the Communist ideology that are adverse to our concepts as well as to our interests -- adverse also, we like to think, to the interests of world peace. But here there are certain circumstances that we must be careful to bear in mind.

First of all, what communism means today embraces a very wide spectrum of outlooks and behavior. Some of these Communist elements, like the Chinese Communist regime, present from our standpoint as ugly and menacing a phenomenon as did Lenin's Russia at the height of its world-revolutionary enthusiasm. Others, as in the case of the Yugoslav regime or the Italian Communist Party, are operating on the basis of concepts which present no greater problems from our standpoint than those that govern the behavior of many regimes or parties that do not call themselves Communist at all. It is simply impossible to generalize, today, about communism as a problem in the spectrum of American foreign policy.

But in addition to that, even within the framework of the individual Communist parties or regimes, the nature of communism is not a static thing. It has already undergone great changes in many instances, and is still in a process of change everywhere. This is particularly important in the case of the Soviet Union. I can assure you that the outlooks that are prevalent today in the Russian Communist Party are greatly different from those that prevailed in earlier decades. Of course, not all of these outlooks are reassuring; habits of thought, prejudices and preconceptions

still endure that we have to recognize as hostile and dangerous to the only sort of world stability we can imagine. Efforts carried forward in the name of these outlooks merit our continued vigorous and vigilant resistance. But these are no longer the only outlooks that exist. In the main, the changes that have come over Soviet communism and the mental world of its leaders, particularly in the years since Stalin's death, have been hopeful rather than alarming ones -- ones which, if properly understood and met from the non-Communist side, hold encouraging rather than menacing connotations for the prospects for world stability.

It must never be forgotten that in the pattern of our relationship with any great nation there are always elements of conflict in outlook as in interest. An uncomplicated relationship between great nations does not exist, has never existed, and will never exist. In the tensions that have agitated the relations between our country and the Soviet Union over the half century of the latter's existence, there have always been, for this reason, two components: one that arose from the peculiar ideological outlooks and commitments of the Soviet leaders -- from their quality, in other words, as Communists; the other one composed of the abundant frictions, suspicions, anxieties and conflicts of interest that normally bedevil the relations between great states and do not constitute in themselves a proper source for discouragement or despair with relation to the prospects for world peace. I think it may safely be said that, in the pattern of our differences with the Soviet leadership over the course of the past fourteen years, that component which reflects the nature of the Communist ideological commitments has tended generally to decline; and the relative importance of the other component, the normal one, has tended, accordingly, to rise. Many of us would be helped in our thinking about the problems of Soviet-American relations if we could free ourselves from the abnormal sensitivities and reflexes to which the extreme tensions of earlier decades have led and teach ourselves to think about Russia as simply another great world power with its own interests and concerns, often necessarily in conflict with our own but not tragically so -- a power different in many respects, but perhaps no longer in essential ones, from what Russia would have been had there been no Communist revolution in that country fifty years ago.

Finally, there is one vitally important point on which I would like to conclude. Not only does international communism present itself to us today in many diverse aspects, and not only is it a phenomenon constantly in process of change; it is also something that reacts sensitively in many respects to what we do and say, and must therefore be regarded as partially subject to our influence. Almost everywhere in the Communist world there are forces more inclined to appreciate the values of a peaceful world and to contribute, where they can, to development in that direction, and there are forces less inclined to move along this line. We have it in our power, by the manner in which we frame our policies, to encourage or to discourage either of these conflicting forces. International communism is thus not just entirely what we find it to be. It is in part what we make of it.

The implications of all this, from the standpoint of American policy, are of enormous seriousness at this present moment. We stand today at something of a parting of the ways with respect to our approach to the Communist world. If we fail to take account of the encouraging elements in the situation -- if we act as though they did not exist and carry our differences against individual Communist powers as though we were still dealing with the naive world-revolutionary force of Lenin's day or with the grim monolith of Communist power that confronted us in the days of Stalin -- we may be neglecting and discarding the only chance that I can see to spare ourselves or our children, or both, the immeasurable catastrophes of a world war among nuclear powers.

As one whose professional experience with world communism now runs back for just forty years, I think I have as intimate an acquaintance with this phenomenon as anyone in this country. I saw it and knew it at first hand in the difficult times of the nineteen-thirties. I knew it again at the most difficult time of all -- at the heyday of Stalin's triumph and arrogance at the end of World War II. I had the temerity to urge publicly upon our Government and our people at that time patience in the approach to Russian communism, being confident that there would be changes, and thinking it likely that these changes would be ones that would make it easier for us to cope with it without inviting the catastrophe of another war. These changes have now come. They are, in my most earnest opinion, of such a nature as to give us, for the first time perhaps since 1917, real and

hopeful possibilities for the adjustment by peaceful means of our relations with certain of these Communist countries, particularly the Soviet Union. I can think of nothing more tragic than that today, when these possibilities are really coming into being, when rays of light are visible which twenty years ago were only gleams of hope in our own eyes, we should fail to perceive or recognize these hopeful elements, should lose our patience just when it is most vitally important to retain it, and should risk driving our differences with Communist powers to a violent and apocalyptic conclusion.